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Planning for Children's Play: exploring the 'forgotten' right in Welsh and Scottish policy

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Abstract:	<p>A range of practical examples and research indicate that planners are not always equipped to critically consider children's play. Whether this be due to policy, lack of knowledge, or unwillingness, evidence suggests a lack of attention to children's spatial needs is contributing to their marginalisation in public space. However, the right to play, rest, leisure and access to cultural life is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This article examines what children's play as a right means for planning systems, with particular reference to Scotland and Wales. Each nation takes a different approach, and the article concludes by suggesting ways policy could be strengthened to inform practice. This could help address children's declining spatial freedom.</p>

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A range of practical examples and research indicate that planners are not always equipped to critically consider children's play. Whether this be due to policy, lack of knowledge, or unwillingness, evidence suggests a lack of attention to children's spatial needs is contributing to their marginalisation in public space. However, the right to play, rest, leisure and access to cultural life is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This article examines what children's play as a right means for planning systems, with particular reference to Scotland and Wales. Each nation takes a different approach, and the article concludes by suggesting ways policy could be strengthened to inform practice. This could help address children's declining spatial freedom.

Keywords: children's rights; social justice; equalities; policy analysis

Introduction

Planning covers a wide range of issues which can leave planners with conflicting aims. They may simultaneously seek to gain the views of the public, meet political goals, and commit to the public's long-term interest, without necessarily having the oversight to determine what this looks like spatially. Consequently, planners may not be aware of the variety of differing needs of both communities of characteristic and of locality. The theme of equality and planning has received increasing attention in recent decades, particularly with regard to gender, ethnicity and age (Greed, 1994, 1999; 2000, 2005; Sandercock, 1998; Sugiyama & Ward Thompson, 2007; Buffel et al., 2012; Hockey et al., 2013). However, one group that remain overlooked are children (Adams & Ingham, 1998; Gillespie, 2013; Cele & van der Burgt, 2013; Wood, 2015).

Children's outdoor experience is rarely considered beyond placing schools, playgrounds and sporting facilities (Cunningham & Jones, 1999; Hart, 2002; Freeman, 2006). This lack of attention has arguably led to dramatic decline in children's independent mobility across the last two generations, with the freedom of UK children falling behind many of their European counterparts (Shaw et al., 2015). Much of this can be traced to the increase in motor traffic, and a rise in fear of 'stranger danger' with regards to children, and research in health, sociology, and human geography points to the negative effects this is having on their wellbeing (Hiscock & Mitchell, 2011). Indeed, whilst playgrounds are the main spatial allocation planners promote for children under age 12, when given a choice children frequently prefer natural, or informal play spaces, including the streets near their homes (Ward, 1990; Valentine & McKendrick, 1998;

Aitken, 2000; Jones & Barker, 2000; Castonguay & Jutras, 2009). In fact, '[t]here is a tendency to see play as a performance-based activity as opposed to a behavioural process' (Chilton, 2002, p. 115), and in this sense, play is misunderstood as a temporally and spatially specific activity, rather than any spontaneous interaction with the environment (Russell & Lester, 2013). This raises issues beyond the wellbeing of individuals, to impact international human rights commitments contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989). The UK government ratified the UNCRC in 1991, and with this committed to meet Article 31 which gives all people aged below 18 the right to play, rest, leisure and access to cultural life. However, this right is often labelled 'forgotten', as it is rarely high on the agenda of governments (IPA, 2013; Voce, 2015).

In this paper, I address the gap in research on spatial provision for children, by looking at how planning policy and practice mediates their access to outdoor environments, focusing on the allocation of space for, and consideration of children's needs. I use the term children to refer predominantly to those in middle childhood (age 6-12), at this age children have increasing will to explore, but restricted freedom of movement. I look at Scotland and Wales to compare the contrasting approaches of these devolved administrations, which address children's UNCRC rights in different ways. Whilst each nation plans differently for children, they are more directly comparable than with England, where play policy no longer exists (Voce, 2015), and Northern Ireland where planning is transitioning from a centralised to localised administration (Planning Portal Northern Ireland, 2015). This comparison is helpful in the pursuit of understanding different governance strategies and recognising that there is no one UK experience (McKee et al., 2017).

Methods

I collected the data as part of a project on children's rights and planning. It consists of: semi-structured interviews with an officer from the two national play charities (Play Scotland and Play Wales); four officers working in children's and/or planning policy in each nation; and interpretive policy analysis (Yanow, 2000). I conducted interviews with full ethical approval, and have anonymised participants as far as is practical. I chose participants in Scotland based on links they had with children's participation in the planning decision-making process. Meanwhile, I selected interviewees in Wales based on their involvement with coordinating local level planning and play policy, and my ability to travel to the local authority area. I selected national-level policies for their relation to play, planning, and children's rights. This means in Scotland I review the myriad of policies and legislation that govern children's outdoor play, whilst in Wales I track the implementation of a recent legal duty to facilitate Article 31 of the

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2
3 UNCRC. I begin by exploring what children's play is and its place as an Article 31 right, before
4 examining what a planning system that understands children's spatial needs must consider. I
5 then relate this to the policy situations, and testimony from practitioners in each nation to
6 evaluate what they appear to achieve for children. The paper ends with a suggestion of how
7 children's play may be better considered as part of what planners do.
8
9

10 11 12 **The Value of Play**

13
14 A propensity to play is characteristic of childhood across the world and throughout
15 history (Tindall & Stevens, 1977; Schaefer & Reid, 2001). Developmental psychology has
16 shown it to have a constructive role in children's physical and social development, and
17 academic thought is shifting towards giving children as much freedom and opportunity to learn
18 through unstructured play as possible. Indeed, historical analyses have tracked the consistency
19 of play over recent centuries (Ariès, 1962; Cunningham, 2005). Despite this, the cultural value
20 placed upon it is variable, ranging from a tolerance of the 'needless' play of children, to an
21 emphasis on adults and children playing together (Gaskins et al., 2007). Furthermore, there is
22 varying weight placed on the landscape of play; whether this be indoors; outdoors; structured;
23 unstructured; supervised or unsupervised; and whether play is an affordance to the very young,
24 or encouraged throughout childhood. These vary along economic conditions, religious beliefs
25 and social structures, and whilst European nations generally value play on some level, there is
26 evidence that the Anglo-American view of childhood is particularly focused on limiting risk in
27 play (Gill, 2007, 2008, Shaw et al., 2013, 2015).
28
29

30
31 So far, Article 31 has remained an issue in the UK's UNCRC implementation (Davey &
32 Lundy, 2011; The UK Children's Commissioners, 2015). In modern societies, play can be
33 dismissed as frivolous, or a tool to be used for training and educating children more effectively
34 (Whitebread et al., 2012), and play researchers are concerned that this instrumentalisation
35 negates the *inherent* value it has to children (Powell, 2009; Whitebread et al., 2012; Holloway
36 & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014; Voce, 2015). The dominance of developmental psychology in this
37 field has contributed here, and placated the institutionalisation of childhood experiences for the
38 sake of increasing pre-defined developmental outcomes (Smith, 2014). Additionally, adults
39 often perceive outdoor environments as dangerous, and redirect play towards designated spaces,
40 or relegate it to a private, indoor activity. (McKendrick et al., 2014; The Wildlife Trusts, 2015).
41 This raises concerns that play is widely misunderstood, and poorly-designed environments
42 affect children's desires to interact with their surroundings.
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45
46 Due to widespread inaction from governments across the world, the UN's Committee
47 on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (2013) published general comment no.17 on Article 31. This
48 re-enforces a need for all public agencies to fulfil their obligations, by understanding that a
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range of governmental actions affect children’s leisure opportunities. To realise the right, children need freedom from stress, social exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, as well as the time and space to play (Lester et al., 2008). This places planning as one of many services influential in meeting children’s rights, yet in the following section I question the extent to which it has historically met this challenge.

Outdoor Play, Planning and Playwork

One profession especially concerned with children’s declining freedoms is playwork. Playwork and town planning were officially established around the same time in the UK. For playwork, this came about with the post-war concern that the increasingly functionalist way places were designed created space and social attitudes at odds with the playful child (Kozlovsky, 2008). For instance, the rise of motor traffic has greatly reduced the ability of children to venture out alone, and romantic ideals of growing up in natural surroundings are now a minority experience (Hillman et al., 1990; Jones, 2002; Shaw et al., 2015).

Playwork originated with the birth of adventure playgrounds, first heralded by the Danish landscape architect Carl Theodor Sørensen in 1931. Watching children playing with leftover materials on construction sites inspired him to propose:

Perhaps we should try to set up waste material playgrounds in suitable large areas where children would be able to play with old cars, boxes, and timber. It is possible there would have to be some supervision to prevent children fighting too wildly and to lessen the chances of injury (Allen, 1971).

This led to the building of the first ‘junk’ playground, and the movement spread across the UK after Lady Allen of Hurtwood visited Denmark in 1946. Involved in movements to improve children’s lives, it struck her that ‘junk’ playgrounds held the potential both to provide children of all circumstances opportunities for free play, and to revive the many bombsites blighting post-war English cities. These playgrounds would contrast with traditional ones, which are:

a place of utter boredom for the children, and it is little wonder that they prefer the dumps of rough wood and piles of bricks and rubbish of the bombed sites, or the dangers and excitements of the traffic (Allen, 1946, pp. 26–27).

In 1951 a bombsite in London became the UK’s first venture, yet due to local opposition that a ‘junk’ playground would lead to hooliganism, they were renamed ‘adventure’ playgrounds (Benjamin, 1974; Kozlovsky, 2008).

Whilst adventure playgrounds and playwork still exist today, planning has at times inhibited their agenda. Whilst Allen’s vision for bombsites across English cities to become locally-run and managed adventure playgrounds (Wilson, 2013) was partially fulfilled, the

model of grass roots, child-centred development was at odds with the County of London Plan (Forshaw & Abercrombie, 1943). This conceived of the Blitz as an opportunity for redevelopment in line with the dominant, rationalist planning ideology. Consequently, at the end of the 1950s most of London's ten adventure playgrounds were returned to their owners for redevelopment (Kozlovsky, 2008), and this trend was replicated across the country (Benjamin, 1974).

In the pursuit of creating 'environments that enable children to experience the sort of play opportunities and experiences that have been lost from daily life' (Children's Play Information Service, n.d), adventure playgrounds are now only one part of what playworkers do (Brown & Cheesman, 2002). Table 1 shows how playwork and planning are organised, and whilst both fulfil a public service, there is a disconnect between the facilitation of each on the part of national and local government. This reflects an ongoing trend of neglecting social issues in planning (Greed, 2000), but positioning the two professions as separate is incompatible with the 'public interest' aims of both. For instance, playwork partially compensates for environments that are not child-friendly, but the planning system has aided in a wider lack of attention to children's spatial needs. The dominant paradigm of planning for economic growth can render adult ambitions for place above children's (Wood, 2015), and arguably encourages a need for the playwork profession to exist. Yet, it also restricts playworkers' abilities to carry forward their principles. If planning facilitated more child-friendly environments, then adventure playgrounds and playwork would not need to 'compensate' for poor outdoor opportunities (James, 1974).

Table 1 here

From reviewing evidence, it is clear that Article 31 requires children have space to roam where they are likely to be safe, and have access to open space where they will not face unreasonable opposition from other users (Greed, 2015). It is important to slow down traffic or to remove it altogether from the areas where children live (Whewy & Millward, 1997), and play areas (formal and informal) should be placed to maximise informal surveillance (Walsh, 2006). In the context of a housing estate, this could be through the deliberate creation of 'play streets' or homezones (Gill, 1997). Emphasis on natural spaces that children can interact with under their own volition increases the play-value (Lester & Maudsley, 2006). However, play spaces need not be structured as children will largely play anywhere; it is adults that problematise the places they choose (Ward, 1990; Jones & Barker, 2000). Consequently, it is

important to ensure appropriate safety, but balance this with creating experiences that enrich children’s lives, rather than focusing on what is convenient for adults.

Reconciling Play, Planning and Playwork?

To link children’s play with land use planning, the fields of environmental psychology and children’s geographies are useful. In particular, Kytta (2004) provides a conceptual understanding of children’s use of outdoor space in her Fields of Action theory (Figure 1). Here, the environment provides a range of potential affordances for children, in which lie three ‘fields of action’. On one side, the ‘field of promoted action’ contains types of environmental exploration encouraged by adults. On the other side, the ‘field of constrained action’ contains the explorations adults limit. For adults, these lie at opposite ends of what a child should and should not do. In the middle lies the ‘field of free action’, in which a child freely chooses their activities. This overlaps to an extent with the fields of promoted and constrained action, but also sits within its own sphere of ‘other’ activities they undertake without adult intervention. The child will seek to increase the time they spend in the field of free action, and here they experience the actualised affordances of a given environment. Related to planning for the right to play, the challenge is to increase the size of the ‘field of free action’, whilst reducing the ‘field of constrained action’. Overall, this would increase the child-friendliness of the environment.

Figure 1 here

Equally important to Kytta’s (2004) work is a growing movement for child-friendly cities (c.f. Gleeson & Sipe, 2006; Freeman, 2011; Ellis et al., 2015; Cushing, 2015). The UN’s vision for these are to guarantee the right of every young citizen to:

- influence decisions about their city
- express their opinion on the city they want
- participate in family, community and social life
- receive basic services such as health care, education and shelter
- drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation
- be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
- walk safely in the streets on their own
- meet friends and play
- have green space for plants and animals
- live in an unpolluted environment
- participate in cultural and social events

- be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2004, p. 1)

With this has also come the European Network of Child-friendly Cities, which adapts these principles into guidance and support of greater relevance to the lives of children in Europe. They set out five guiding principles of taking a Holistic, Integral, and Intergenerational approach, recognising the ‘Importance of participation of children and youth’, and ‘Dynamic trade and continuous challenge’ (European Network of Child Friendly Cities, 2014). This entails urban governance that sees children as part of all they do in relation to social and spatial practice. It also highlights that a child-friendly city is not a project with a beginning and an end, but an approach that strives to reflect on changing circumstances. The network includes members across the continent, but the initiative is not widely taken up in the UK. Instead, it has been developed mostly in other Northern European nations (Haikkola et al., 2007; Horelli, 2007; Björklid & Nordström, 2007; Youth, Education & Society department of the City of Rotterdam., 2010; Nordström, 2010; van den Berg, 2013).

Building on the literature, Figure 2 presents a framework for achieving child-friendly environments that establishes how planning can pay greater attention children’s spatial needs. This requires time, space, and attitudes that support children’s play. It shows that whilst planning cannot solve all play-related issues by itself, it cannot remain something to compensate for. This entails combining the aims of planning and playwork, and an important element of this is policy and its implementation. Therefore, this paper now turns towards play and planning policy in Scotland and Wales, to assess the extent to which they adhere to Figure 2, with a focus on the interaction of policy and planners’ abilities to consider spatial outcomes for children.

Figure 2 here

The Scottish Approach to Planning for Play

Scottish Government (2013a) takes an outcomes-based approach to policy, striving for its overarching objective ‘to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth’. They approach this through 16 national outcomes, three of which relate directly to children and/or young people. Whilst none relate explicitly to children’s rights, Scottish Government supports children’s play through their ‘Health and Wellbeing’ social policy agenda, particularly through a national play strategy (Scottish Government, 2013b,c), and focus on the earliest years of a child’s life (Scottish Government, 2015a). Within this, they link Health and Wellbeing with planning, but

do not have a coordinated way to link planning and play policy directly. Thus, examining where and how these links *do* already exist provides insight into how the Scottish planning system considers play.

Scottish Government’s (2013b) vision for play is set out in a national play strategy:

Children’s play is crucial to Scotland’s wellbeing; socially, economically and environmentally (p. 6).

This strategy recognises the role of the planning system in delivering children’s play opportunities:

The type of environments available for play have a major impact on the nature of that play so careful consideration should be given to the planning and design of public spaces and particularly for communities within the built environment. Children and young people should have access to play spaces, whether they are park areas or informal spaces where they choose to play (p. 20).

This is a first step to aligning the two policy areas, and from here it suggests two planning policy documents that support the play strategy:

Scottish Planning Policy sets out that planning authorities should protect valued open space, and seek to address needs identified in open space strategies. There should be clean, safe and welcoming spaces for children and young people to play and gather where they are not considered a nuisance by others in their communities, as set out in Designing Places [now obsolete] and Designing Streets (p.20).

To assess the alignment between these policies, it is important to understand the structure of the Scottish planning system, shown in Figure 3. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (Scottish Government, 2014) is the country’s, national-level planning policy document. It is an important consideration in the construction of development plans, and in determining individual planning applications. Similarly, Designing Streets (Scottish Government, 2010) is national-level architecture and design policy that should guide developers and planners in their decision-making. Whilst neither of the policies has statutory standing, they are important in facilitating the strategic direction of the planning system. Statutory planning policy in the third National Planning Framework (NPF3) (Scottish Government, 2013b) then focuses on economic matters, and is the primary consideration in the formation of strategic and local development plans.

Figure 3 here

Whilst NPF3 does not mention play, SPP makes one reference:

Local development plans (LDPs) should identify sites for new indoor or outdoor sports, recreation or play facilities where a need has been identified in a local facility strategy, playing field strategy or similar document. They should provide for good quality, accessible facilities in sufficient quantity to satisfy current and likely future community demand (Scottish Government, 2014, p. 51).

This policy does help facilitate play, but it focuses on specific *facilities*, rather than children's wider spatial needs. Moreover, it lists requirements for safeguarding outdoor sports facilities, but not for play facilities or informal open space. This led the Play Scotland interviewee to lament:

in the same way that if a full size football pitch is to be removed anywhere, Sport Scotland are the statutory consultees [organisation that must be consulted on relevant planning applications]... we've argued that there should be a similar body either set up, established, or responsibility given to Sport Scotland for informal recreation spaces because these are the spaces that are actually far more important and fundamental to the health and wellbeing of communities.

A lack of statutory support for informal play space arguably makes the ability of planning authorities 'to protect valued open space' weak. Indeed, whilst SPP references the Play Strategy as a 'key document' under the heading 'Green Infrastructure' (Scottish Government, 2014, p. 50), a planner would be going beyond their statutory remit to consider it in their own practice. Similarly, the document Designing Streets (Scottish Government, 2010), and the new architecture and design policy, Creating Spaces (Scottish Government, 2013d) acknowledge how good design allows children to play outside, and suggests prioritising their needs over road traffic, but has no statutory standing. In contrast, the main driving documents see everything predominantly in economic terms and potentially neglect the role of spaces that have no direct economic value. This means that whilst national planning policy goes some way to supporting children's play, developments can gain planning permission without considering the broader implication of children's access to space.

To illustrate how open space can become disregarded, Planning Advice Note 65: Planning & Open Space (PAN65) (Scottish Government, 2008, p. 1) states:

Open spaces are important for our quality of life. They provide the setting for a wide range of social interactions and pursuits that support personal and community well-being... New areas of open space of enduring quality and value have, however, been the exception rather than the rule and existing spaces are under pressure not just from physical development but also from poor management and maintenance.

With this, SPP (Scottish Government, 2014) and NPF3 (Scottish Government, 2016) are positive about protecting and enhancing the country’s natural resources and promoting ‘green infrastructure’. This means planning authorities are required to produce open space audits and strategies, and should categorise spaces by their use, and assess their quality. This should help them determine where maintenance needs to take place, and where development should and should not happen. However, NPF3 (Scottish Government, 2014a, p. 8) also states:

Planning has an important role to play in finding new and beneficial uses for previously used land including, in the right circumstances, ‘green’ end uses.

...

Temporary uses for vacant and derelict land, for example for community growing or supporting biodiversity, can also help to attract investment in specific sites or wider areas. Whilst re-use of vacant land remains a priority, in some cases greening initiatives could be the best permanent solutions for sites where built development is unrealistic for cost or other reasons. (ibid, p. 46)

This suggests that, whilst supportive of open space, ‘green’ land uses require specific circumstances to make them an option.

Whilst Scottish Government policy has wide implications for the inclusivity of green infrastructure (Greed, 2015), PAN65 does state:

The open space needs and desire of the local community must be established. Attention should be paid to the aspirations of all communities and interests, including ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups, women, children, older people and those with disabilities (Scottish Government, 2008, p. 11).

However:

In some cases, it may be better value to promote a consolidated high quality network of open spaces, rather than a more extensive pattern of spaces where management and maintenance of many areas are neglected (ibid, p. 13).

Whilst this may make economic sense, as the Play Scotland interviewee noted, it can ignore the value of small pockets of open space, which significantly influences the time and space children have to play outside. Thus, planning and play sit within separate spheres of government policy (economic and social respectively), and there is little imperative for interaction. This means planners *could* take a robust approach to children’s play, but it could be overridden by statutory concerns. These structural issues reflect the historic relationship between children’s play and planning, and are why the Play Scotland interviewee stated:

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4 it's very difficult to actually make the difference that we would like to make in the
5 planning system.
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10 ***Planning Policy-makers and Play***

11 Confirming the impact of the lack of policy attention to children's play, an actor
12 involved in the process of national policy development stated in interview that they were not
13 sure how legislation and policy on children affected planning policy. As all other interviewees
14 from the planning sector in Scotland, they had not considered how children's rights might affect
15 the outcome of planning (though they were working to include children's opinions in the
16 community engagement process). In spite of this, they stated:
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21 I'm trying to remember where I used to play and I don't remember playing in the
22 playground when I was a kid!
23
24

25 In fact, in relation to children's rights, a local officer suggested:
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28 That could be really valuable for all authorities across Scotland to be more aware of...
29 There are proposals in the local development plan, you know like 500 homes on a site -
30 well how are we organising the space that will be created? There will be a requirement
31 for it, but it won't be done on the basis of how children use space and essentially it
32 really ought to be.
33
34

35 This officer commented:
36
37

38 I think there's a lot of other aspects where it's either unknown or, you know, how much
39 of a 'planning matter' is it? It would be difficult to say what is and isn't...it's very grey.
40
41

42 These experiences suggest Scottish planners do not actively consider children's use of space,
43 but that they can consider the impact it ought to have if the issue is raised with them. These
44 encounters suggest planners could consider children's use of space more robustly if policy
45 encouraged and supported them to do so.
46
47

48 Turning attention to some recent developments that may affect planning in the future,
49 Scottish Government (2013d) set out an action plan for achieving the play strategy vision that
50 relays some actions related to planning, though predominantly to Community Planning
51 Partnerships (CPPs). These publicly led, local partnerships co-ordinate cross-departmental
52 issues and engage with local communities, and both NPF3 (Scottish Government, 2016) and
53 SPP (Scottish Government, 2014) emphasise the importance of linking land use and
54 community planning. If these can work effectively across policy and departmental spheres, they
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may help planners recognise the rights of children. However, it is important to be critical of this potential, as research suggests CPPs have not always been successful in achieving their strategic objectives, and in facilitating partnership working (Park & Kerley, 2011; Matthews, 2014).

Although CPPs *may* not be equipped for their notional role, the interviewee at Play Scotland was optimistic about the impact of the play action plan:

We are getting ready to do the next phase of the actions and ‘Play and Place’ is a strong theme for us... We’ve got a lot of papers ready to release, like research on what does happen and we’re now looking at what actions we now need to expand and meet to support taking it forward.

Part of this progress is the development of ‘The Place Standard’ (Architecture & Design Scotland et al., 2015); a tool to provide a structure for people’s conversations about place. A range of people can use this tool in a range of circumstances, but the 14 criteria set a common framework for what makes a ‘place’. ‘Play and recreation’ is included as an indicator, and the Play Scotland interviewee hoped this would bring it into conversations about changes to areas. Another tool is ‘Play Maps’ produced by Play Scotland which aims to help CPPs put together play strategies (Elsley, 2015). However, as very new tools ‘to start conversations’, with no official standing in the planning system, it is difficult to envisage their influence on space to play.

Whilst non-statutory policy and tools can play a role, historic neglect suggests statutory measure may be necessary to solve a lack of incentive to think strategically about play in planning. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 aims to make Scotland the best place to grow up, and puts a duty on Scottish Ministers to:

- keep under review whether there are steps they could take to strengthen their approach to implementation of the UNCRC;
- take any appropriate actions in response to this;
- promote awareness and understanding of the UNCRC; and
- report and require any recognised public bodies to report on their progress in furthering the UNCRC every three years.

With this, Scottish Government (2015b) introduced a requirement for Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) on all new legislative and policy developments. This could help educate planners on the wider context of children’s rights and their obligations as duty bearers in new policy. Whilst this legislation may not encourage proactive engagement with play from planners, it provides grounds for cautious optimism for future integration in due course. Yet, it is not possible to predict how Scottish Ministers will interpret their duty, with a duty to report, not the same as a duty to progress (Tisdall, 2013). Indeed, the act gives a stronger statutory standing to indicators of wellbeing than it does to rights, and Tisdall (2015) notes that

they are not equivalent policy concepts, and rights have an important part to play in setting minimum standards, particularly in policy areas where children are not the priority. To expand this understanding of rights and legislation, I now turn to investigate the Welsh approach.

The Welsh Approach to Planning for Play

Welsh Government takes an approach to planning for play sparked by their long-standing collaboration with Play Wales, which meant:

we ended up meeting this guy who had an oversight of all of Welsh Government business and he was the one who said at the time, “unless there is a statutory duty for children’s play in Wales, it’s unlikely that local authorities will take this seriously” (Play Wales interviewee).

With this, Welsh Government takes a rights-based approach to policy, presenting seven core aims for children and young people that align with the UNCRC. Of these, Core Aim 4 is entitled ‘Play, sport, leisure and culture’, and focuses on achieving Article 31 (Welsh Government, 2015). As part of this agenda, Wales is the first country in the world to legislate for children’s play (Russell & Lester, 2013). Their approach is known as ‘the play sufficiency duty’, and contained in The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. Thus, instead of direction coming from a range of policies as in Scotland, children’s legislation is used to influence a wider range of local approaches, to recognise the interconnectivity of services affecting children. This duty is organised into two parts, with the first commenced in November 2012. It states:

- (1) A local authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in accordance with regulations.
 - (2) Regulations may include provision about—
 - (a) the matters to be taken into account in assessing sufficiency;
 - (b) the date by which a first assessment is to be carried out;
 - (c) frequency of assessments;
 - (d) review of assessments;
 - (e) publication of assessments.
- (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010, p. 8).

To accord, each local authority produced a Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) in March 2013, following guidelines that lay out nine matters for consideration (Play Wales & The Welsh Government, 2012). The second part of the duty commenced in July 2014, requiring that:

- (3) A local authority must secure sufficient play opportunities in its area for children, so far as reasonably practicable, having regard to its assessment under subsection (1).

Within this “play” includes any recreational activity; and “sufficient”, in relation to

play opportunities, means sufficient having regard to quantity and quality (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010, p. 8).

Welsh Government left the concept of play sufficiency vague, so that local authorities could determine how best to measure it in their own community. This was met with mixed feelings from the ‘play leads’ coordinating the process in different local authorities, and Russell & Lester (2013) expound on the trials and tribulations of this experimental policy approach.

Each PSA was coordinated (mostly) by children’s play teams within local authorities, so that the play leads managing the process had primary responsibility for the topic of play. However, to meet the matters laid out in the toolkit (Play Wales & The Welsh Government, 2012), it was essential to work with a range of partners in the public and voluntary sectors. This included those that have been difficult for play teams to engage with in the past (Russell & Lester, 2013). Whilst this presented challenges, the Play Wales interviewee suggested:

overwhelmingly people within those other departments actually welcomed the opportunity to contribute... they didn't see it as being an overwhelming process for them because they could see how being part of this responded to different things that they should be doing.

For instance:

there is a huge drive towards walking and cycling initiatives and safe routes and slowing traffic down, so it immediately ticked some boxes for transport. Same with open space planning... local authorities as part of Planning Policy Wales should be developing Open Space Assessments, as part of their LDPs [Local Development Plans] they should be considering children's play- so they could see where these links were being made.

The local authority interviewees corroborated this, and one interviewee relayed:

I would like to think that the agenda has gone beyond me, because there's so many other people and service areas that are involved with this, and some of these service areas have even taken forward pieces of this work themselves.

This illustrates that the play sufficiency duty has helped draw different local authority agendas together, both combining play with existing elements of work, and progressing new ideas.

An important element of the national and local experience has been drawing links between play and planning departments. Indeed, in reference to planners the Play Wales interviewee expounded:

they were probably the sector that most saw “OK this isn't a new piece of work; this isn't additional work I've got to do. I've just got to do something differently”...

overwhelmingly of all of the sectors I think most play officers would say that planners were the easiest to actually engage with.

Local authority interviewees shared this view, with one in particular describing the role that collaboration had on their relationship with a planning colleague:

Through that process we really came to understand each other's language better and realise that actually what [they were] saying as a planner wasn't that different to what I was saying as a playworker.

From developing this relationship, the play lead felt the planner was willing to help spread the message of a child's right to play, and was better placed to communicate the message to other planners. This shows evidence of an altering of attitudes towards play that can help shape planning policy and practice in the future.

With a change in attitudes of some planners, interviews for this project, and the investigations by Russell and Lester (2013, 2014) report promising signs that upcoming LDPs across Wales will help facilitate play sufficiency. Presently, this is hard to assess, as each local authority is in a different stage of plan development. However, from those either interviewed or having released plans and guidance since the PSA process in 2013, there are outputs from several that illustrate increasingly critical views of play, shown in Table 2. These changes suggest the legislative, rights-based approach is encouraging strategies that can begin positively affecting children's space and time to play if consistently implemented. The playwork sector has overwhelmingly welcomed the play sufficiency duty. Though not all local authorities have forged collaborative relationships between play and planning (Russell & Lester, 2013, 2014), the experiences of those that have are promising. If the momentum built up in the first PSA process can be maintained, then there is a chance of more positive outcomes from the next round of PSAs (March 2016) in terms of increasing time, space and attitudes that support play.

Indeed, the extensive assessment of one local authority yielded findings that formed the basis of further academic study on what makes a place play- sufficient. In particular, if children have a choice of several places to play, then local residents are less likely to be intolerant to their presence outside and children's satisfaction appears to correlate more closely with quantity of space, than with quality (Long, 2017).

Table 2 here

Discussion

Planning and play policy are not direct allies in either Scotland or Wales, yet key differences in how each government structures their approach is affecting how likely, and how much planning policy and planners consider it. Scottish Government takes an outcomes-based approach, whilst Welsh Government takes a rights-based approach. This means that in Scotland children’s play should help meet broader outcomes such as improving health and is a small presence in a wider policy narrative, but in Wales, it should primarily serve Article 31 of the UNCRC, and taking this rights-based approach requires giving it legislative standing. Related to this, in Scotland there has so far been no obligation on planning authorities to consider Article 31, and the lack of knowledge around children’s use of space and policy from interviewed Scottish actors corroborates this. In Wales however, it is unlawful for planning authorities not to help ‘secure sufficient play opportunities in its area for children, so far as is reasonably practicable’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010, p. 8).

In Scotland, a myriad of policies, strategies, guidelines and frameworks, shown in Figure 4, guide how the public sector approaches children’s play. This means the links between policy areas and initiatives are not always clear for those working in planning and play. Indeed, Scottish Government frames statutory, national planning policy as primarily economic, whilst policies related to play are primarily social. This makes certain economic considerations compulsory, but leaves many social considerations voluntary. In contrast, Wales presents legislation that requires local authorities to look more broadly at play. This does not mean planners must take a proactive role, but makes it a compulsory deliberation and helps facilitate dialogue between sectors. Thus, whether or not national planning policy in Wales supports a child’s right to play, local planning policy must, and it is here that direct change in the attitudes of planners and provision of space is most likely. In Scotland, statutory requirements are weak and play-related actions come through CPPs – relying on their ability to facilitate actions through local planning. This may occur in some local authorities already, but new legislative developments now make it more likely that planners consider children in any *new* policy.

Figure 4 here

Conclusion

Play is too important to the lives of children to be forgotten, and national governments are beginning to understand the importance of play in a variety of policy areas. Moreover, it is an internationally recognised, and widely ratified human right. This article has argued that

children's play is not a separate policy area from planning, with the planning system having partly facilitated changes to the outdoor environment that have aided the decline in children's independence. Furthermore, general misunderstanding of the value of play, and children's place preferences means fixed equipment play areas are often the focus of planning for play, and not the creation of generally child-friendly environments (Cunningham & Jones, 1999; Hart, 2002). To reverse this trend, planning needs to address the role and responsibility it has in meeting children's spatial needs, which ultimately aligns with promoting the public's long-term interest. To do this, they can attend to their role in the intersection of supportive time, space and attitudes that promote child-friendly environments, with many playworkers in the public and voluntary sectors useful consultees on these matters.

Aligning these areas requires a change in thinking about the responsibilities planners have towards children. Examining the policy approaches in Scotland and Wales has helped illuminate how this may be done. Whilst the experiences shared in this paper are based on interpretive policy analysis and a small number of interviews, the findings suggest a statutory, rights-based approach is most appropriate to improving children's play opportunities. The play sufficiency duty in Wales, still in its infancy, has spurred a momentum in many local authorities that, if maintained, can spearhead more dramatic changes in time, space and attitudes for play (Russell & Lester, 2013, 2014). If Scottish Government wishes to 'make Scotland the best place to grow up' (Scottish Government, 2012), then following Welsh Government's lead may enhance the effectiveness of its strategy.

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Table 1 The Origins, Aims and Organisations of Town Planning and Playwork in the UK.

	Town Planning	Playwork
Origin	Overcrowding, lack of housing, and the demands of modernisation.	Loss of space for children to play. Potential of vacant bombed sites to facilitate new opportunities for children.
Aim	To organise space in the public’s long-term interest. In Scotland, this follows the pursuit of sustainable economic growth.	To give children the sorts of play opportunities often lost in modern times.
Organisations	National and Local government, Private Consultants, Limited Third Sector actors.	National and Local Government, and the Third Sector.

For Review Only

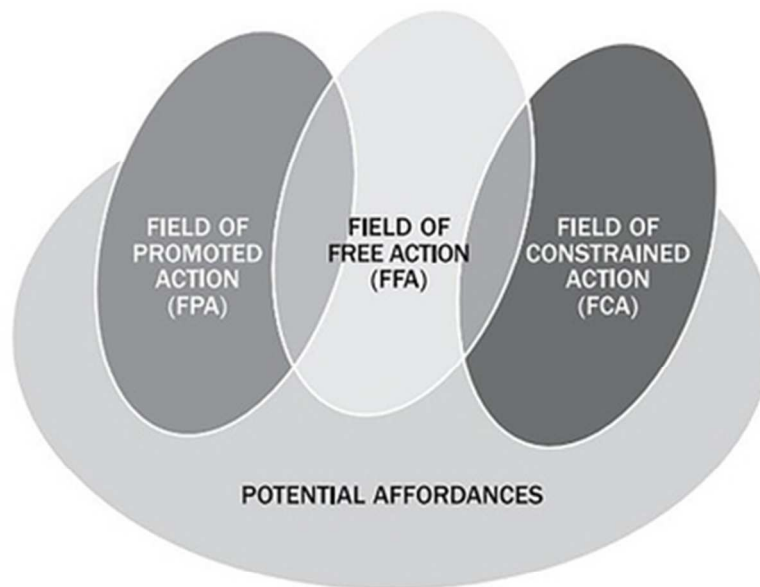


Figure 1 Kytta's (2004) Fields of Action Theory

Figure 1 Kytta's (2004) fields of action theory

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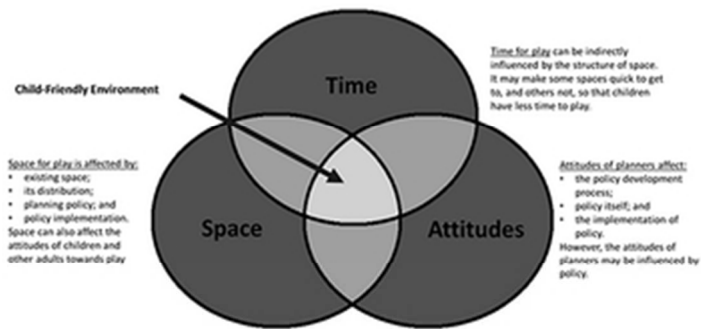


Figure 2 The factors contributing to a child-friendly environment, and the role the town planning system can play within this (Based on Wrexham County Borough Council, 2014).

Figure 2 the factors contributing to a child friendly environment, and the role the town planning system can play within this (based on Wrexham County Borough Council, 2014)

30x17mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Review Only

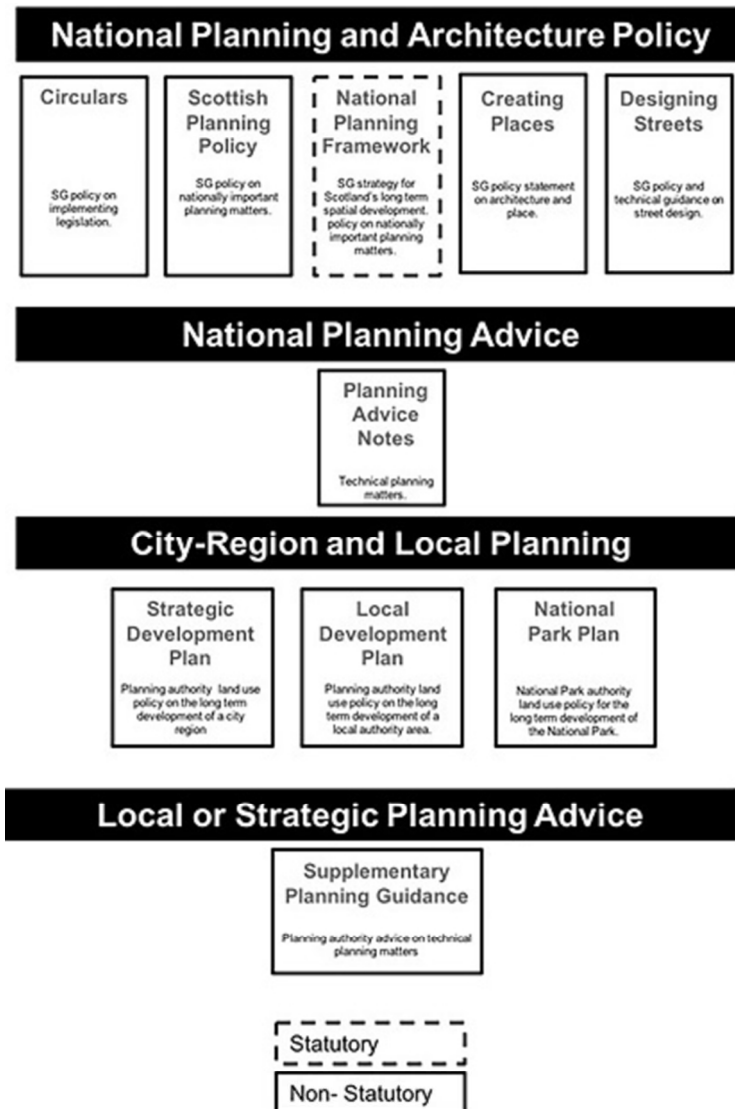


Figure 3 The structure of the Scottish planning system. Diagram based on Scottish Government (2014, p. 1)

Figure 3 The structure of the Scottish planning system. Diagram based on Scottish government (2004, P.1)

53x86mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Table 2 Planning-related outputs from Welsh local authorities since the instigation of the Play Sufficiency Duty.

Local Authorities	Output
Local Authority A (interviewed)	The Play Lead (interview) believed the upcoming local development plan will include a greater focus on play than current local planning policy.
Local Authority B (interviewed)	The planning department issued a piece of supplementary planning guidance on residential design that gives detailed instructions on how developers should consider children’s play. This includes a new process for using the Children’s Play Team as consultants on playground location and design. They have also developed a collaborative group between several departments, including play and planning to push for more shared spaces within the local authority area.
Local Authority C (interviewed)	The Countryside Services department has bid for Big Lottery Funding to develop a coastal path with enhanced play opportunities. The data collected during the PSA revealed there were poor play opportunities in the area, and coupled with high levels of deprivation, strengthened the local authority’s case for funding.
Local Authority D	A policy in their proposed local development plan was devoted to children’s play, and included a hierarchy of provision that prioritised informal open space and streets more heavily than standard planning policy. In the approved local development plan this is absent, but it does mention informal play opportunities as an important provision a number of times. It also suggests the planning department will release updated supplementary planning guidance on open space provision that gives more direction on how to safeguard children’s play.
Local Authority E	The planning department has developed a piece of supplementary planning guidance on open space provision in new residential developments. This includes detailed guidance on providing space for play, focusing on a range and variety of spaces that moves beyond fixed equipment playgrounds.

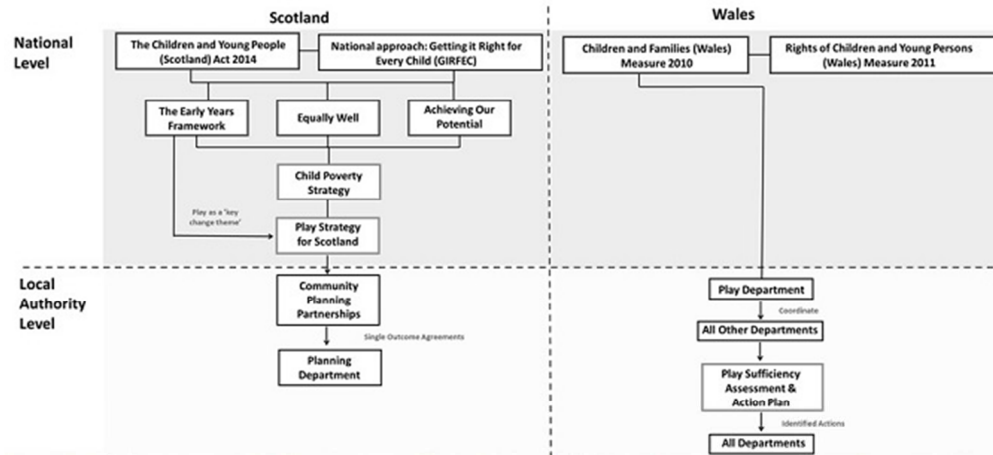


Figure 4 How legislative and policy frameworks in Wales and Scotland are expected by their respective governments to affect local authority planning departments

Figure 4 how legislative and policy frameworks in Wales and Scotland are expected by their respective governments to affect local authority planning departments

177x89mm (96 x 96 DPI)